



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

Community Solutions, *Not* Institutions!

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Testimony before the Planning and Development Committee

February 4th, 2011

In Opposition to HB 5142 and 5259

Good afternoon Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile and members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg, Coordinator of the Keep the Promise Coalition, a statewide, mental health advocacy Coalition dedicated to ensuring that a comprehensive, community mental health system is created and sustained in CT.

The Coalition is in opposition to HB 5142 and 5259, both entitled "An Act Requiring a Public Hearing on the Location of Group Homes." It is already extremely difficult for people with disabilities to find and secure safe, affordable housing in the community and these bills would add an additional, discriminatory barrier.

CT has not kept its promise to properly invest in a community mental health system including employment options, services, and housing. The state is spending \$1200 per day to keep someone in a hospital bed that is ready to move to the community. This crisis-oriented system is a poor use of state taxpayer resources, not to mention the impact it has on our families, friends and communities. These bills would only serve to make it more difficult to site homes in communities that need them, exacerbating the problem.

People with disabilities are protected under the Equal Protection Clause of the State Constitution. They are guaranteed protection from discrimination as a protected class, the same as it does for race, ethnicity, religion, etc. If you fill in the blank with one of the other protected classes, the constitutional issue would be apparent.

Holding a public hearing is discriminatory and would expose a specific group of people to public scrutiny. If someone were to move into a house next door to yours, there is no way to control who lives there and, conversely, there is no way for them to find out information about you without your providing it. Furthermore, people with psychiatric disabilities have protections under state and federal law. Their healthcare information is protected and cannot be shared with the public.

The state and municipalities may be violating the federal Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act by targeting people who have disabilities and discriminating against them on that basis. Providing communities with facts about and resources for people with disabilities is the way to strengthen communities. Discrimination and segregation is not. Thank you for your time.

